

Breakheart Pass

Alistair MacLean was a highly prolific and successful author who was no stranger to the movies, with fifteen of his novels being turned into films, including *The Guns of Navarone*, *Where Eagles Dare*, *Puppet on a Chain*, *When Eight Bells Toll*, *Force Ten from Navarone*, *Ice Station Zebra*, *Fear is the Key*, and *The Satan Bug* (written under his pseudonym, Ian Stuart). He also provided the screenplays for several of those films, including *Where Eagles Dare*, *Puppet on a Chain*, *When Eight Bells Toll*, and, in 1975, the screenplay based on his 1974 novel, *Breakheart Pass*. He was so popular at that time that his name was featured as part of the title: Alistair MacLean's *Breakheart Pass*.

Breakheart Pass was produced by Jerry Gershwin and Elliot Kastner, who'd already produced MacLean's *Where Eagles Dare* and *When Eight Bells Toll*. To direct, they hired Tom Gries, who'd cut his directing teeth in television on such iconic shows as *Have Gun, Will Travel*, *The Rat Patrol*, *Wanted: Dead or Alive*, *The Rifleman*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Route 66*, *Batman*, and *I Spy*, and then graduated to films such as *Will Penny*, *100 Rifles*, *The Hawaiians*, *Lady Ice*, and *The Greatest*, as well as two classic TV movies, *The Glass House* and *Helter Skelter*, as well as the mini-series *QB VII*.

A stellar cast was assembled, including Charles Bronson, Ben Johnson, Richard Crenna, and Jill Ireland, along with a terrific supporting cast that included Charles Durning, David Huddleston, Ed Lauter, Bill McKinney, Archie Moore, and Sally Kirkland. Photo-graphing was the great Lucien Ballard. What they all delivered was a wonderfully entertaining adventure yarn, one with rousing action sequences, and one that kept you guessing as to who was really who and who was doing what to whom.

A train is on its way to Fort Humboldt, where there is a diphtheria outbreak. The train is filled with reinforcements and medical supplies. Or is it? Also on board is a

local lawman (Ben Johnson) and his prisoner, outlaw John Deakin (Bronson). Or is he an outlaw? As the train hurtles its way to its destination, we find that nothing is as it seems, and at Breakheart Pass everything comes to a head, with an Indian attack, villains and heroes revealed, and enough action to satisfy any action fan. The stunts are great – they were supervised by the legendary Yakima Canutt, whose final film credit this was – the end of a career that began in 1915 and spanned fifty-five years. The film achieves all of its spectacular effects naturally – there is no CGI or models (they actually destroyed a real train for the film), and there are some really breathtaking sequences both on the train and off.

But what becomes an action adventure movie most is its score, and Jerry Goldsmith's score for *Breakheart Pass* is as good as it gets. By 1975, Goldsmith had already established himself as a major force in film music, some would say the major force, having written such classic scores as *A Patch of Blue*, *Patton*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Chinatown*, *The Wind and the Lion*, *The Sand Pebbles*, *Freud*, *Seconds*, *The Mephisto Waltz*, and *The Other*, to name just a handful of his endlessly creative and brilliant oeuvre. Of course, he would go on to write even more classic scores subsequent to *Breakheart Pass*, including some of his most beloved and worshipped music: *The Omen* (for which he won an Oscar), *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, *Logan's Run*, *Coma*, *Islands in the Stream*, *Capricorn One*, *The Boys from Brazil*, *Magic*, *Alien*, *Poltergeist*, *First Blood*, *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, *Gremlins* and many, many others.

Goldsmith had worked with director Gries on *100 Rifles* and the mini-series *QB VII* so they knew each other's sensibilities well. From the first guitar strums of the main title, Goldsmith's score does what all great scores do – involves you instantly and sets you up for what's to come. His theme is addictive and propulsive – it literally makes

you sit up and take notice. From there it's a thrill ride as he captures not only the rhythm of the train itself (which is a character in the film), but tender moments, moments of high suspense, character moments, and, of course, the adventure sequences, which no one did better than Goldsmith.

Breakheart Pass was previously released on CD by La La Land Records. This release is essentially that album as mastered by James Nelson, some notable exceptions: In the film, there is a wonderful action sequence towards the end on top of the train. Goldsmith apparently didn't score it, but Gries and his music editor thought music would help there and so two cues were edited together for that sequence ("Run-away" and "Box Car Fight") and we've recreated that edit for this CD and put it in the proper sequence – it plays beautifully with it. On the previous CD there were two bonus tracks – some guitar strums called "Four Styles" and a trumpet cavalry call. We have left off the cavalry call since it has nothing to do with Jerry Goldsmith or his score. The four guitar strums are not really germane to anything but we've kept them. But the biggest difference is the inclusion of a cue that was missing from the previous release. The hunt for that cue took weeks – pulling every tape MGM had and frustratingly not finding it anywhere. Finally, we decided to pull the D/M/E tracks and that's where we got it from – it's a great cue (it's actually the second half of the cue called "Here They Come") and we're thrilled to finally have it available. We include it in two forms – in the score program as a part two of "Here They Come." The "Here They Come" album cue was missing its electronics at the beginning, so as a bonus we give you the entire cue as it plays in the film, complete from the music track of the D/M/E.

— Bruce Kimmel